

Open letter to all Assembly Members

19 September 2016

Dear Assembly Member

We are writing to give you some key points of information about the changes we are making to GCSE Welsh Second Language in advance of Plaid Cymru's debate at Plenary on Wednesday 21 September 2016 (item 4).

We are happy to discuss our work in this area with you in more detail. If you would like to know more then please email [chief.executive@Qualificationswales.org](mailto:chief.executive@Qualificationswales.org)

### **GCSE Welsh Second Language – key points**

- 1) Welsh Government policy is to pursue improvement to Welsh language learning through curriculum reform. The national curriculum sets out what schools are required to teach. Under the current curriculum, schools are required to teach Welsh second language and will do so until the new curriculum is introduced for all schools, expected to be in 2021.
- 2) Welsh Government has taken the decision to remove the GCSE Welsh Second Language short course from 2016 and retain the full course.
- 3) We are taking practical steps to improve the full GCSE qualification now. Our changes will:
  - strengthen the focus on speaking and listening to ensure that learners have the everyday Welsh skills they need for the real world;
  - remove the reliance on narrowly defined vocabulary and topics that can constrain learning and attainment in the language;
  - clarify the expectation that the time dedicated to teaching should be the same as for other GCSEs.
- 4) Preparing students for these changes will be challenging for schools. Our experience has shown that qualifications don't succeed if the workforce is not prepared. Improving teaching and assessment is the first step towards supporting the longer term changes required.

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- 5) Recommendation 10 from the report '*One language for all: review of Welsh Second Language at Key Stages 3 and 4*' stated that, within a three to five year timetable, Welsh Government should:

“ ...

- *develop new level descriptions with the revised programme of study for Welsh and produce guidance for schools which includes defined expectations for learners in Welsh-medium, bilingual and English-medium schools;*
- *develop a new full GCSE (or equivalent) qualification based on the revised curriculum; and*
- *remove the short course GCSE.”*

Any new qualification or qualifications based on these new level descriptors will be significantly different to those that are currently offered and will require a different assessment approach. Strengthening the existing GCSE qualification is very much an interim measure, but one that will make a real and immediate difference to learners while the new curriculum is developed.

- 6) We stand ready to trial and shape new assessment methods building up to the development of a new qualification in line with the new curriculum. We are working with Welsh Government to understand appropriate assessment approaches for the new curriculum; and we have already commissioned research to look at how a continuum of language acquisition can be developed to support good teaching and learning and effective assessment.
- 7) Our principal aims place the needs of learners at the heart of our work. Substantial changes to qualifications must be managed carefully to allow sufficient time for teachers and learners to prepare; changes made too quickly are likely to pose risks to learners and ultimately to the success of any new qualifications.
- 8) We appreciate that the titling of the new GCSE as 'Second Language' is a cause for concern among some stakeholders. Given the nature of the changes that we are making to the new GCSE qualification, we are considering whether a change in title is needed.

We welcome the focus that the forthcoming debate will provide for these planned developments in this important subject area.

Yours faithfully



**Ann Evans**  
Chair, Qualifications Wales



**Philip Blaker**  
Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales.